STRATEGIC DEPLOYMENT: MOBILIZING AND MOVING THE FORCE

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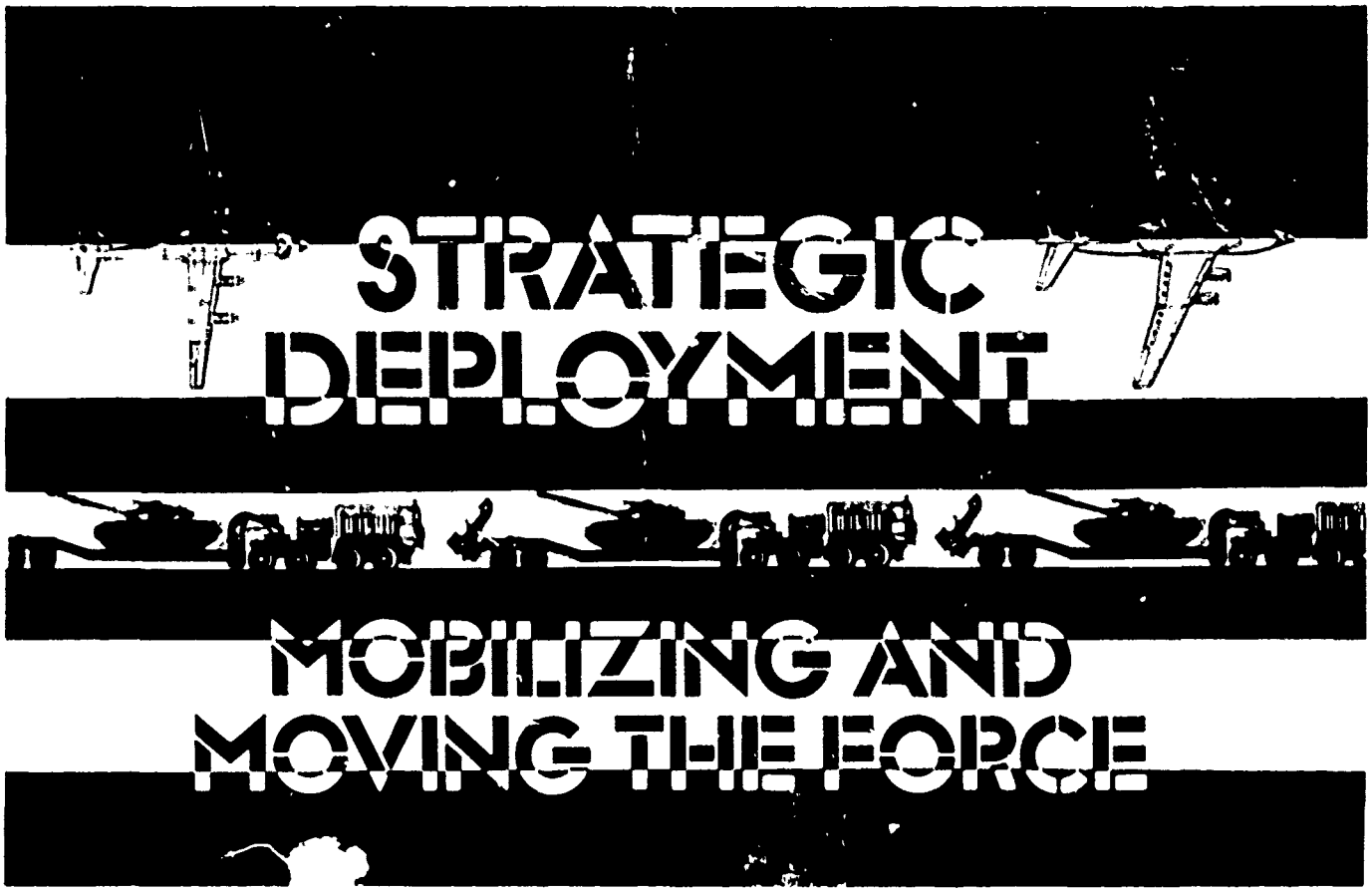

STRATEGIC DEPLOYMENT

MOBILIZING AND MOVING THE FORCE

Graham H. Turbiville Jr.

Soviet initiatives at the bargaining table calling for deep cuts in conventional forces may well be more than hollow offerings. According to the author, recent Soviet writings and thinking on strategic deployment in particular indicate a willingness to accept fewer forward deployed forces. He also warns that improvements and probable changes in deployment and mobilization systems may allow them to maintain and even enhance strategic deployment capabilities.

THE TRANSITION of the Soviet armed forces from a peacetime to a wartime footing and the creation and concentration of combined arms groupings for the conduct of military operations are processes affected directly and fundamentally by evolving Soviet perceptions of the nature of future war. The complex of plans, preparations and resources integral to this process—which the Soviets designated "strategic deployment"—has undergone sweeping change over the past 30 years and could be substantially modified as a consequence of continuing technological change, large-scale force restructuring and conventional arms reductions in Europe.[1] In what now constitutes an extensive and growing body of material assessing the nature of strategic deployment for war, Soviet planners point to ways in which requirements for mobilizing and moving the armed forces have changed, and are changing, this "basic issue of strategy."[2]

Perceived Soviet requirements for strategic deployment needs in the first years after World War II were based on two major factors: first, those requirements that Soviet

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planners associated with the difficult circumstances of surprise and lost initiative encountered at the beginning of the war; and second, the need to support the kinds of strategic combined arms operations that characterized, in particular, the last period of

***[Soviet planners] stressed that strategic deployment planning and preparations must in all cases be founded on* speed, secrecy *and* deception, and aimed at seizing the strategic initiative through forestalling or overtaking enemy mobilization, deployment and combat actions.**

World War II. Beginning in the early postwar years, these lessons learned were set out in detail and focused on both the need for speed in mobilizing and deploying forces and the requirement for continuous force generation and movement throughout the duration of a conflict.[3] Further, the mobilization, concentration and movement of forces, together with the conduct of initial operations, came to "comprise a single inseparable process" captured by the term "mobilizational deployment."[4]

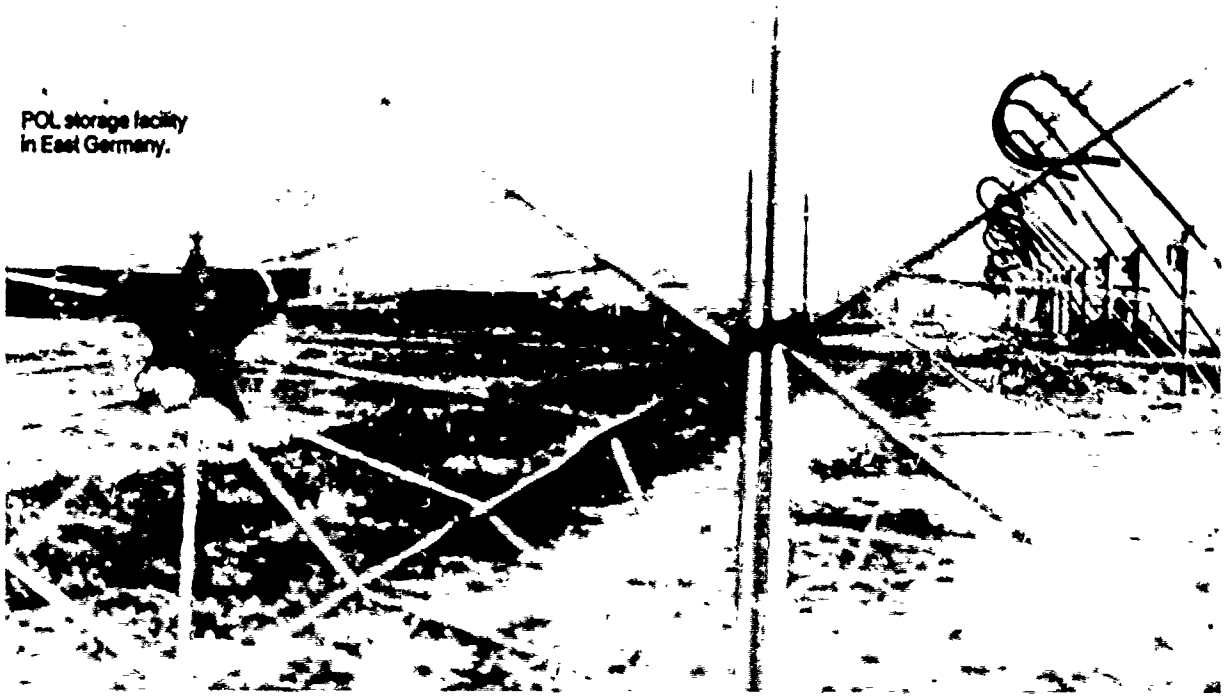
The "revolution in military affairs" engendered by the widespread introduction of nuclear weapons changed Soviet perceptions of strategic deployment requirements in the early 1960s. The almost exclusive focus by Soviet planners on nuclear conflict variants in this period reinforced the need for speed in mobilizational deployment, but emphasized the decisive role to be played by military operations conducted by force groupings already existing and largely deployed in peacetime. While the execution of some mobilization and deployment measures after the initiation of hostilities was certainly envisioned, the likelihood of early or surprise enemy nuclear attack on transportation and mobilization centers and the decisive nature of friendly nuclear strikes on enemy forces and facilities were thought to render these measures both problematical and less important. In addition, the likely short duration of a general nuclear war radically reduced the need for continuous force generation.[5]

This 1960's view of strategic deployment in the nuclear age was encapsulated by Marshal V. D. Sokolovsky's *Military Strategy*, which pointed to the obsolescence of past approaches and judged that mobilization, concentration and deployment measures could for the most part be "carried out ahead of time and merely completed in a period of threat."[6] Soviet strategic deployment planning and preparations in the 1960s were predicated on this view, which was reflected throughout military writings and large-scale exercises of the period, and by Soviet force organization and the military support infrastructure.

Current Soviet Approach and System

The Sokolovsky judgment on strategic deployment, noted above, was singled out for special criticism by Colonel General M. A. Gareyev in his 1985 book *M. V. Frunze—Military Theorist.*[7] Gareyev acknowledged the obvious desirability of meeting strategic deployment requirements before the outbreak of hostilities, but went on to cite the many practical military and military-political considerations that could prevent this. He and other Soviet planners stressed the need for a strategic deployment system that could deal with any conflict variant and that could meet the needs of the Soviet armed forces "under any conditions in which imperialist aggressors initiate war."[8]

Indeed, classified Soviet sources a decade earlier had already made precisely this point. These sources set out distinctions between strategic deployment in nuclear and nonnuclear war, and described approaches that would meet the specific, attendant features and difficulties associated with each variant.



POL storage facility in East Germany.

Beginning in the 1970s, the element of strategic deployment termed "preparing theaters of military action" received new attention. This process, which is continuing apace, takes many forms, but is centered mainly on pre-positioning large stockpiles of ammunition, POL (petroleum, oils and lubricants), and other supplies in forward theater areas [plus] improving the road, rail, air, and water transportation links and facilities essential for the movement of military units and materiel.

They stressed that strategic deployment planning and preparations must in all cases be founded on *speed, secrecy* and *deception*, and aimed at seizing the strategic initiative through forestalling or overtaking enemy mobilization, deployment and combat actions.[9] These principles continue to govern Soviet approaches to strategic deployment and are reflected in current Soviet peacetime force structure, readiness and deployment, and in the preparation of theaters of strategic military action (TSMAs) around the Soviet periphery.

In regard to Soviet planning for operations against NATO generally, preallocated, forward-based tactical units and operational formations are deployed and maintained in peacetime at levels of strength and operational readiness adequate to undertake initial operations immediately, while lower strength/less ready forces in each TSMA are to be rapidly mobilized and deployed to fill out or reinforce operational groupings early in a conflict. The emphasis is on fielding large Warsaw Pact combined arms groupings rapidly on key strategic and operational directions. These forces are to be strong enough to repel an enemy surprise attack, cover ongoing operational deployment and rapidly undertake operations on a theater-strategic scale. Plans and preparations are made for the continued generation of forces—including the creation of new units—and the introduction of large strategic reserves of all types to sustain military operations for periods that may be protracted. In a nuclear war, such strategic reserves would be used largely to reconstitute severely reduced theater forces, while in a nonnuclear

conflict they would be intended principally to achieve the conventional force superiority necessary for achieving theater objectives.[10] Integral to the whole process is a quick-reaction mobilization system that draws on the Soviet Union's large reserve military manpower base and earmarked transport vehicles and equipment from the national economy.[11]

Given the extreme difficulty in interdicting [battalion-increment reinforcements] the substantial speed and inherent flexibility it possesses, and its ability to deliver rested, combat-capable maneuver units to forward areas, heavy lift units would likely receive even more emphasis in a post-reduction Europe.

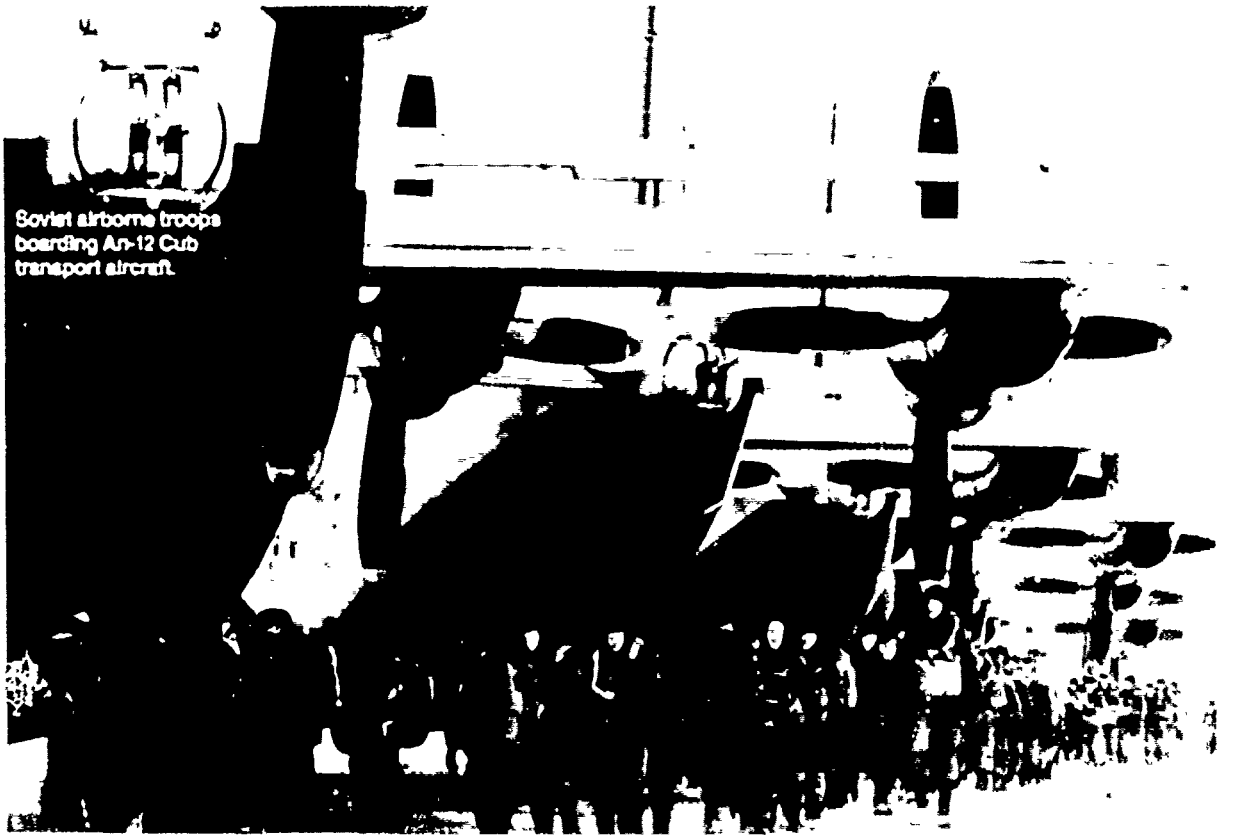
Beginning in the 1970s, the element of strategic deployment termed "preparing theaters of military action" received new attention. This process, which is continuing apace, takes many forms, but is centered mainly on pre-positioning large stockpiles of ammunition, POL (petroleum, oils and lubricants), and other supplies in forward theater areas; improving the road, rail, air, and water transportation links and facilities essential for the movement of military units and materiel; prestocking lines-of-communication repair and reconstruction materials; designating and preparing components of the Soviet and East European national economy (hospitals, repair facilities, and so forth) to support the military in time of war; establishing hardened command posts and communication facilities for the control of theater forces; and associated training and planning measures in the military and national economy that are all explicitly identified by the Soviets as integral to strategic deployment.[12] Clearly, the high commands of forces established in two of the three theaters facing NATO play an important role in strategic deployment, in that they are intended in part to facilitate the rapid transition of theater forces to a wartime footing.[13]

Strategic Deployment and Future Soviet Force Posture

There is a potential that Soviet forces in the forward area—and perhaps forcewide—will be reduced as a consequence of technological, operational and conventional arms control developments. The large-scale reduction of Soviet theater forces in Europe through any, or a combination, of these factors will unquestionably affect Soviet approaches to the strategic deployment of the armed forces in a number of respects. In judging what Soviet adjustments—or more radical changes—may be undertaken in regard to movement, mobilization and associated training issues, it is necessary to keep in mind, first of all, that despite changing Soviet perceptions of the nature of future war, the stated Soviet objective for strategic deployment in a theater conflict is twofold. That is, strategic deployment must ensure and provide for:

- Creating the required superiority in forces and means over the enemy in the TSMA, in order to conduct the initial strategic operations successfully.
- Seizing the strategic initiative, achieving victory in the initial operations and developing efforts by the commitment of forces arriving from the interior.[14]

Superimposed on these goals—which the weight of evidence to date suggests will remain unchanged over the next decade—is the continuing requirement to plan for the employment of nuclear weapons by the enemy and to meet the kinds of mobilization and deployment demands such employment would present. In addition, the perceived danger posed to transportation lines and facilities by precision-guided munitions already fielded, as well as those projected for future introduction, will continue to grow as a major Soviet planning consideration.



Soviet airborne troops boarding An-12 Cub transport aircraft.

Soviet planning for strategic movement is predicated on the integrated use of all forms of transport. Rail will remain a critically important means of strategic movement in many circumstances and the continuing growth and capability of military transport aviation is significant in terms of transporting tailored motorized rifle or airborne light armored forces.

Movement and Reinforcement

Among the principal criteria for Soviet planners considering acceptable levels of conventional force dispositions would be the potential for establishing operational groupings capable of meeting the above requirements. While not minimizing the potential problems involved, Soviet planners judge that even limited Soviet transport resources—in a period of threat preceding war—could reestablish sizable combat forces in the forward area in a short period of time through a combination of covert and overt means.

Soviet planning for strategic movement is predicated on the integrated use of all forms of transport. Rail will remain a critically important means of strategic movement in many circumstances and the continuing growth and capability of military transport aviation is significant in terms of transporting tailored motorized rifle or airborne light armored forces.[15] Additionally, the potential of inland waterways and the water movement of forces along maritime axes is not insignificant from the Soviet planners' perspective.[16] The role and relative contributions of various types of transportation means have been examined and reexamined by Soviet planners in the 1970s and 1980s.[17] While all movement means have advantages and limitations, it is a Soviet perception that units moving by march, under their own power and with attached motor transport means, will be of critical importance. Indeed, it is a Soviet planning assumption that *all* units located in border military districts will move to the forward area by march.[18]

Strategic heavy lift transporter units would be particularly important in this regard and their present capability serves to illustrate

this. That is, if approximately two-thirds of the 3,500 heavy equipment transporters now assigned to strategic transporter regiments were assigned to support the Western TSMA, any of the following force packages could be moved from the western Soviet Union to East Germany in 72 hours, or, perhaps, in less than half that time:[19]

- More than 50 tank or BMP-equipped motorized rifle battalions.
- Ten tank regiments or 10 BMP-equipped motorized rifle regiments.
- Two or three tank or motorized rifle divisions.
- One or two "new army corps" plus some 20 tank or motorized rifle battalions.
- Tens of thousands of metric tons of bulk supply items, such as ammunition, POL, and so forth.

The prospect of a limited—or perhaps sweeping—reorganization of Soviet maneuver units may focus Soviet attention further on small unit reinforcement options such as the option indicated in the first point above.

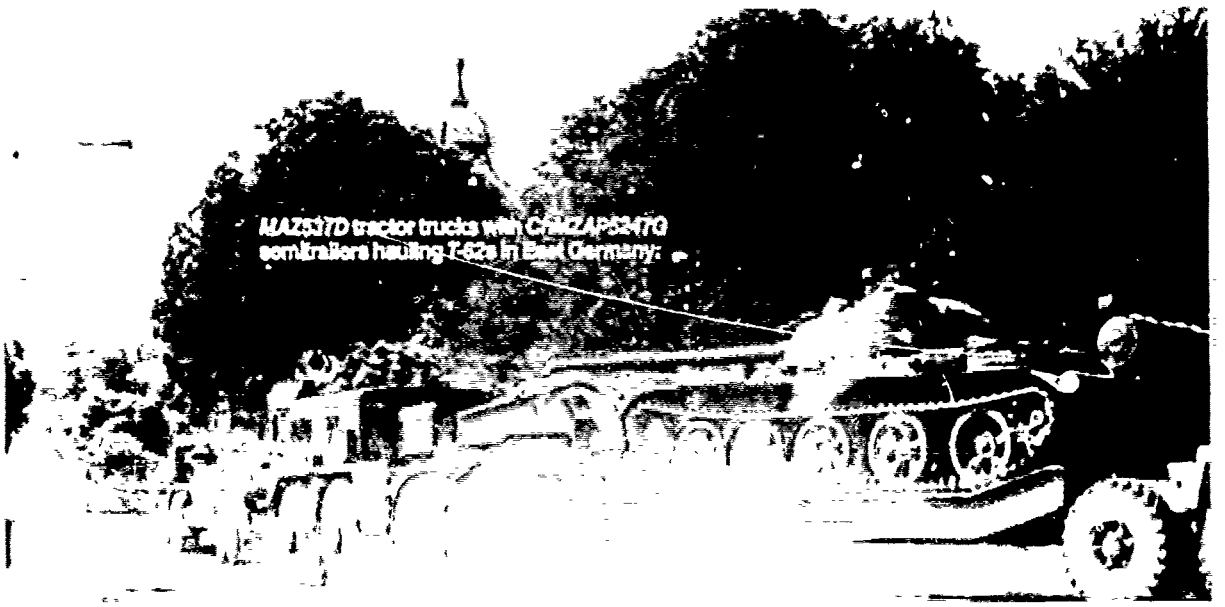
Even a superficial examination of Soviet capabilities in this rega.., however, suggests that substantial conventional force reductions may well be acceptable to Soviet planners charged with evaluating approaches for reestablishing forward deployed force groupings in time of crisis or war.

That is, a Soviet force-restructuring effort centered on the creation of corps and brigades with subordinate battalions—as some evidence suggests may be underway—would further increase the utility of reinforcement by battalion increment, since the battalion would comprise the basic building block of larger tactical units and operational-tactical formations.

Given the extreme difficulty in interdicting this means of strategic transport, the substantial speed and inherent flexibility it possesses, and its ability to deliver rested, combat-capable maneuver units to forward areas, heavy lift units would likely receive even more emphasis in a post-reduction Europe. A substantial increase in the size of this strategic transport force could be made quickly and relatively cheaply. Thus, the potential for rapid reinforcement represented by this transport mode alone may give Soviet planners reduction and reinforcement options that are not immediately apparent to Western observers.

Dramatic increases in Soviet movement and reinforcement capabilities are possible in the near term as a consequence of new technological innovations. Soviet Lieutenant General M. M. Kir'yan and others have pointed to the potential of wing-in-ground (WIG) technology for the transport of large military cargos.[20] The Soviets underscore the speed, heavy loads and modest fuel consumption associated with low-flying WIG craft, as well as their capability to travel as easily over ground as water and to negotiate high obstacles. Combining the characteristics of aircraft and ships, these vehicles may be involved in the land and sea transport of both tactical units and materiel.

Overall, reinforcement potential by individual or integrated transport means will exercise a major influence on the size of conventional force reductions or reorganizations Soviet planners may consider and on post-reduction/reorganization military capabilities. Computer simulations designed to evaluate a spectrum of reduction variants and transport combinations are essential for better defining Soviet options and perspectives.[21] Even a superficial examination of Soviet capabilities in this regard, however, suggests that substantial conventional force reductions may well be acceptable to Soviet planners charged with evaluating approaches for reestablishing forward deployed force groupings in time of crisis or war.



It is a Soviet perception that units moving by march, under their own power and with attached motor transport means, will be of critical importance. Indeed, it is a Soviet planning assumption that all units located in border military districts will move to the forward area by march.

Pre-positioning

The pre-positioning of equipment and supplies, as noted above, is part of the Soviet approach to preparing TSMAs for the conduct of military operations. Its purpose, of course, is to minimize transport requirements in an environment of widespread interdiction, to minimize the many competing transport requirements associated with mobilization or war and to improve the speed of operational deployment and timely commitment of force groupings.[22] With major force reductions and the consequent requirement to rapidly reestablish operational groupings under the threat of enemy interdiction, pre-positioning in some respects would grow in importance. Currently, pre-positioned logistic stockpiles in TSMAs opposite NATO are capable of supporting many weeks of operations by the large theater combined arms forces now allocated to each theater. While the continued maintenance of these forward deployed stocks would be essential, their further increase would probably not be required should there be a post-INF Treaty reduction of maneuver and support units. However, the hardening and dispersal of some stocks to provide for their survivability would be desirable from the Soviet planners' perspective, as would the improvement of local transportation means to provide for their timely movement to field locations in a period of threat.

The pre-positioning of unit-configured equipment sets to be manned by troops introduced into the forward area could, of course, reduce movement requirements substantially. It is in this area that new Soviet pre-positioning initiatives would be most likely. There is ample precedent for the Soviets creating such force packages, and their extensive creation in connection with troop withdrawals may constitute an attractive Soviet option.[23] While maneuver unit equipment sets would clearly be good candidates for pre-positioning, it is probable that engineer, repair and technical support, medical and other support unit sets would be pre-positioned as well.

Military Mobilization System

The Soviet mobilization system is intended to provide—within hours of the notification of a general mobilization—hundreds of thousands of reservists and equipment items of all

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types to units and formations throughout the armed forces. After bringing designated reduced-strength active units up to full strength and creating those immediately needed new units, the system would be focused on the continued generation and build-up of cadre and new units and the mobilization of reservists and equipment from the national economy. With substantial conventional force reductions in the forward area or the Soviet Union itself, adjustments to the mobilization system may also be forthcoming.

While speed, secrecy and efficiency in mobilization have always been emphasized, they would acquire a special character in a post-reduction environment. Additional emphasis would be placed on the initial, incremental, covert mobilization of forces, and a host of tailored *maskirovka* (deception) measures designed to disguise mobilization and deployment through their various stages. A number of Soviet sources have suggested what such measures might comprise.[24] Combined with a strategic deployment system designed for the surge generation of forces in a short period of time, the Soviet goal of "forestalling and overtaking" enemy strategic deployment might be achieved, even with a substantial reduction of forces in the forward area. Relative enemy mobilization and deployment capabilities are, of course, an explicitly noted element of Soviet calculations in this regard.[25]

Despite the obvious advantages of computer technology in the operation of military commissariats, Soviet literature suggests that computers are only now beginning to be employed in this role and not very effectively.[26] It is likely that new emphasis would be placed on fully automating the commissariat system, particularly in border military districts. Far more careful attention would be given to identifying military specialists and general troops required for early call-up, with those reservist personnel needed to constitute key combat and support units predesignated and periodically trained to an extent that greatly exceeds current standards. Special categories of highly trained reservists designated for early call-up would probably be created, and partial mobilization exercises would be held more frequently and be more demanding. The periodic movement of personnel and selected units to forward deployment areas in Eastern Europe and the border military districts would probably play a growing role in such exercises.

Reservist training overall—which according to some reports is uneven and often inadequate—would receive new emphasis, particularly if Soviet forces were reduced and not simply relocated. The reported poor performance of conscripts (and reservists) in Afghanistan suggests that preinduction training under DOSAAF—a Russian acronym for Voluntary Society for Cooperation with the Army, Air Force and Navy—may be upgraded as well, if a smaller force were to be more effective in the early stages of conflict.[27] Even recognizing the demographic problems involved, the prospects of reinstating a three-year term of service for some ground force conscripts may be considered. It is most unlikely that Soviet planners would accept today's levels of reservist and conscript training as adequate for a smaller force in the future.

Overall, there is a spectrum of Soviet options for meeting strategic deployment goals in a future environment shaped by new battlefield technologies, restructured forces, and conventional arms reduction. Soviet operational groupings with adequate levels of training could be rapidly fielded and committed—

even with substantial force reductions/relocations in forward theater areas. Such strategic deployment could be accomplished through a combination of existing and improved strategic transportation means, current pre-positioning practices and new initiatives centered on the creation of unit-configured equipment sets, and adjustments to the mobilization system and associated training measures. Similar options could be implemented in response to a broader Soviet conventional arms cut, in which Soviet units were not just relocated, but deactivated or placed in cadre status. Finally, while analogous measures could be undertaken to offset the deactivation of indigenous, non-Soviet, Warsaw Pact forces, it is probable that Soviet planners would look more closely at the contingencies existing in the mid-1960s, when the need to establish force groupings incorporating far less effective Warsaw Pact forces was preeminent in Soviet war planning. MR

NOTES

1. For a recent definition of strategic deployment, see S. F. Akhromeyev, ed., *Strategicheskoye razvertyvaniye* [Strategic deployment], *Voyennyy entsiklopedicheskiy slovar'* [Military encyclopedia dictionary] (Moscow: Voyenizdat, 1986), 711.

2. As noted in Lecture Materials from the Voroshilov General Staff Academy, "Strategic Deployment of the Armed Forces": "The nature, characteristics, sequence, and methods of conducting actions concerning the strategic deployment of the Armed Forces continually change in accordance with changes and modifications in the nature of military arms and equipment, as well as with changes introduced in the forms of initiating war."

3. See, for example, A. Zaporozhchenko and V. Galitskiy "*K voprosu strategicheskogo razvertyvaniya vooruzhennykh sil osnovnykh kapitalisticheskikh gosudarstv vo vtoroy mirovoy voyne*" [On the question of strategic deployment of the armed forces of the main capitalist states in the second world war], *Voyenno-istoricheskiy zhurnal* [Military-Historical Journal], hereafter translated as *VIZh*, (April 1964), 38–52; and A. Kharkov, "*Iz opyta osmobilizovaniya sukhoputnykh voysk*" [From the experience of mobilizing the ground forces], *VIZh* (April 1982), 53–60.

4. A. G. Kharkov, "*Nekotoryye voprosy strategicheskogo razvertyvaniya Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil v nachale Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny*" [Several questions of strategic deployment by the Soviet Armed Forces at the start of the Great Patriotic War], *VIZh* (January 1986) 15.

5. Oleg Penkovskiy, *The Penkovskiy Papers*, introduction and commentary by Frank Gibney, translated by Peter Deriabin, (New York: Avon Books, 1966), 222–57, has a useful account of the debates and changes taking place within the Soviet armed forces at that time.

6. This characterization of the "Sokolovsky view" was made in M. A. Gareyev, *M. V. Frunze-Voyennyy teoretik* (Moscow: Voyenizdat, 1985), 241. See also V. D. Sokolovsky, *Soviet Military Strategy*, 3d edition, edited, with analysis and commentary by Harriet Fast Scott (New York: Crane, Russak and Company, 1975), particularly chapters VI and VII.

7. Gareyev, *M. A. Frunze*, 239–42.

8. Ibid., 242.

9. Lecture Materials from the Voroshilov General Staff Academy, "Strategic Deployment of the Armed Forces."

10. Ibid.

11. Graham H. Turbiville Jr., "Soviet Military Planning and the Role of Reserves," *National Guard* (July 1981), 8–11.

12. Lecture Materials from the Voroshilov General Staff Academy, "Preparation of the Territories of Theaters of Strategic Military Action."

13. See Ryszard Jerzy Kuklinski, "*Wojna z narodem widziana od srodka*" [The war against the nation as seen from the inside], *Kultura*, no. 4/475 (1987), 52–55, for a discussion of the sweeping authority of the Soviet Supreme High Command and General Staff in controlling non-Soviet Warsaw Pact forces, as well as background on the establishment of TSMA High Commands.

14. The many dimensions of these fundamental requirements are addressed in detail in Lecture Materials from the Voroshilov General Staff Academy, "Strategic Deployment of the Armed Forces."

15. Lecture Materials from the Voroshilov General Staff Academy, "The Combined Arms Army in the Long-Distance March."

16. Ibid.

17. For example, *VIZh* ran a series of 10 articles from August 1979 to September 1980 dealing with the issue of troop regrouping over great distances. Among the notable articles in this series are N. M. Remyanichev, "*Iz opyta peregruppirovki armiy pri podgotovke Berlinskoy operatsii*" [From the experience of army regroupings during preparation for the Berlin operation], *VIZh* (August 1979), 9–16; I. Tret'yak, "*Ob operativnom obespechenii peregruppirovki voysk v period podgotovki Man'chzhurskoy operatsii*" [Regarding the operational support of troop regrouping in the period of preparing for the Manchurian operation], *VIZh* (November 1979), 10–15; and M. Kozlov, "*Peregruppirovka voysk v khode voyny*" [Regrouping of troops in the course of war], *VIZh* (September 1980), 10–17.

18. Lecture Materials from the Voroshilov General Staff Academy, "The Combined Arms Army in the Long-Distance March."

19. For a more detailed discussion of heavy lift units, see Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth M. Kellner and Graham H. Turbiville Jr., "Soviet Reinforcement in Europe," *Military Review* (April 1987): 34–43.

20. M. M. Kir'yan, *Voyenno-tekhnicheskiy progress i vooruzhennyye sily SSSR* [Military-technical progress and the armed forces of the USSR] (Moscow: Voyenizdat, 1982), 292. As US Department of Defense, *Soviet Military Power*, 5th ed. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1986), 93, pointed out, WIG technology "takes advantage of the increased aerodynamic lift that occurs when a wing operating near the surface experiences a reduction in induced drag."

21. The Soviets themselves, of course, have been using such computer simulations for some years in their assessments of rear service issues to include transportation support. See I. M. Gokhshko and N. V. Varlamov, *Osnovy modelirovaniya i avtomatizatsii upravleniya tylom* [Principles of modeling and automating rear service control] (Moscow: Voyenizdat, 1982).

22. Lecture Materials from the Voroshilov General Staff Academy, "Preparation of the Territories of Theaters of Strategic Military Action."

23. It is likely that pre-positioned equipment sets would be collocated with active units remaining after a reduction of forces, and that elements from the active unit would both maintain the equipment and provide cadres when unit activation took place. A variety of options has been developed by Soviet planners and historical precedent details their successful implementation. For an excellent treatment of Soviet approaches, see Albert Z. Conner and Robert G. Poirier, "Soviet Ground Force Mobilization Potential: Lessons of the Past and Implications for the Future," to be published in a future issue of *The Journal of Soviet Military Studies*.

24. Lecture Materials from the Voroshilov General Staff Academy, "Strategic Deployment of the Armed Forces." See Colonel David Glantz's articles in this issue for a focused look at the role of *maskirovka* and surprise in Soviet thinking.

25. Lecture Materials from the Voroshilov General Staff Academy, "Strategic Deployment of the Armed Forces," and "Combat Readiness of the Armed Forces." Both address this issue.

26. A. Debrin, "*Komp'yuter v voyenkomate*" [Computer in the Military Commissariat], *Krasnaya zvezda* [*Red Star*] (20 January 1987).

27. Alexander R. Alexiev, *Inside the Soviet Army in Afghanistan*, Report No. R-3627-A, prepared for the US Army by the Rand Corporation, Arroyo Center, Santa Monica, CA, May 1988, treats the morale and disciplinary aspects of Soviet performance in detail. See also, Graham H. Turbiville Jr., "Ambush! The Road War in Afghanistan," *Army* (January 1988):32–42, and the author's "Soviet Combat Engineers in Afghanistan: Old Lessons and Future Wars," *The Military Engineer* (September/October 1988):560–65, for a treatment of logistic and combat engineer performance respectively.

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